

With All Your Soul

Loving God with all your Heart Part 2

Matthew 22:38 6-12-11

Summary: Love is the great command because the measure of a soul is the object of its love. God wants our love (sin=adultery). The soul is the seat of the appetites, so to love God with the soul means to look to Him to satisfy the thirst of the soul. He satisfies!

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Matthew 22:35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Introduction

In Matthew 22 Jesus gave us the greatest commandment in all of God's Word, and it is not only the greatest, but it is also the summary of the whole Bible, and the basis for the whole Bible. Nothing in the Bible has any meaning apart from that command. If you obey it you are doing the greatest activity possible for a human being, and if you disobey it you are committing the greatest possible sin. That command is that you must love the Lord your God with every part of your being.

The measure of a soul

Ask yourself this question: How righteous are you? I am not talking about positional righteousness in Christ – I am talking in practical terms. In your day-to-day life, how holy are you? How godly and pleasing to the Lord is your life? My purpose in having you ask yourself that is not for you to focus so much on the answer to the question. Instead what I would like you to do is focus on the criteria you looked at when you were trying to answer that question. When you go to measure how good or bad you are, what is the yardstick you use to make that measurement? What is your criteria?

Actions and thoughts not the best measure

Most people would say it is your behavior. If you do good things you are a good person; you do bad things you are a bad person. But that is not really the most accurate way to measure the goodness

of a person, because good deeds can be done with bad motives. In Matthew 6 Jesus said if you pray and fast and give to the poor, but your motive is self-glory, that is evil.

What about thoughts? Is that the measure? No - demons have many true thoughts and believe them.

What about the choices of the will – what you decide? That does not work either. Suppose one person strongly desires to commit murder or rape, and he derives enjoyment from hurting people, but chooses not to do them because he wants to avoid prison, he is not a good person. So what is the measure of godliness in the heart?

See if you would agree with Henry Scougal. Here is what he said is the measure of how good a person is: “The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love.”¹ He is saying that when you look at your heart and try to assess how good or evil it is, the way to do that is by looking at what your heart loves and does not love. Was Scougal right? Does the Bible teach that evil people are evil because of what they love and righteous people are righteous because of what they love? Listen to Paul describing how bad things will get in the last days – listen to how many times he uses the word “love.”

2 Timothy 3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... 3 without natural love, ... not lovers of the good, 4 ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Evil people are evil because of what they love and do not love. And righteous people are righteous because of what they love and do not love.

1 Timothy 3:2 The overseer must ... 3 not be a lover of money but one who loves the good.

Romans 12:9 Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Amos 5:15 Hate evil, love good.

Psalms 97:10 Let those who love the LORD hate evil.

Psalms 119:104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

When you and I look out over the world, we do not just observe – we observe and evaluate everything we see. We do not just say, “Oh, that thing is really big”; we say, “Oh, that thing is really big and I like it” (or “I don’t like it”). You see a bumper sticker and you don’t just read it like Mr. Spock and say, “The message on that sticker is technically incorrect.” You say, “It’s incorrect and it makes me mad!” Or you agree with it and it makes you smile. And that is what reveals the health or sickness in a person’s heart – not just his analytical evaluations, but which things make him mad, and which things make him smile. If you see something evil and your heart is attracted to it – that is an evil heart even if you manage to restrain your evil actions. And if you see something good and beautiful and your heart is repulsed by it, or unmoved and indifferent towards it – again, that is an evil heart. But the more attracted you are to true goodness and true beauty, the more that shows your heart is good. So what is the best thing a human being can possibly do? The best thing – the most righteous heart – is the one that sees the greatest good and loves it above all. And that is why the Greatest Commandment is the greatest commandment. The most commendable, most holy, most righteous thing you could ever do is love the greatest good, which is God.

1 Cited by John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 18.

Adultery

So goodness and righteousness is a matter of love. And evil and wickedness and sin are the opposite of love. God wants us to think of sin not mainly as breaking a rule, but as a violation of love. That is why God is constantly referring to sin as spiritual adultery against Him. Every time we sin God does not just say, “You broke a rule”; He says, “You committed adultery.” And He calls it adultery so we will understand that what He is really after is not just our behavior, but our hearts. God wants from us is the same thing a husband wants from his wife – and a wife from her husband. Imagine a man came to his wife and said, “I don’t love you anymore. My heart belongs to this other woman. I’m in love with her and prefer to be with her instead of you, but don’t worry because I promise to take out the trash and mow the yard faithfully.” Is she going to say, “Oh, I’m so glad you’re committed to me”? No, she’s going to say, “I want your heart or nothing.” And that is what God says to us. When we fall in love with the pleasures of this world it is unfaithfulness to our Husband in heaven. In James 4 He rebukes the people for their greed and coveting:

James 4:4 You adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred with God?

When our hearts yearn after the world – even if we keep our actions in check – still, God is jealous, like a jilted husband.

Review

Last week we studied the meaning of the Greek word *agape*. We found that *agape* love is not mere devotion or commitment or obedience. Love IS a feeling. At its core love is desire and delight. You desire the object of your love, and when that desire is satisfied it produces delight. Desire and delight are emotions, so first in the list of ways we are to love God is the heart – the seat of the emotions. We talked about that in detail last week, but one thing we did not say much about was the next part – loving God with all your soul. What is that? If the heart is the seat of the emotions, what is the soul? If the greatest commandment requires that we love the Lord with all our soul we had better figure out what the soul is.

What is the soul?

If you look up the word soul in the Old Testament you find something very interesting. The heart is the seat of the emotions; the soul is the seat of appetite. In fact, in some places the Hebrew word is actually translated “appetite.” For example,

Ecclesiastes 6:7 All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.

Your soul is that part of you that craves and hungers and longs and desires. It is that part of you that sometimes feels empty and needs something to satisfy it. The soul is the stomach of your inner man – it is your spiritual stomach, which is why Scripture so often speaks of the hunger and thirst of the soul.

Psalm 42:2 My soul thirsts for God

Psalm 63:1 earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you

Psalm 143:6 my soul thirsts for you like a parched land

Have you ever thought about what the thirst of the soul actually is? What does it mean to be dry on the inside? Or empty? Well, if you look at the circumstances of the psalmists when they use that

metaphor it is pretty clear what it means. It refers to the appetites and longings a person has when they do not have joy.

You know how sometimes when you cannot sleep, and you are lying awake in bed tossing and turning and no matter what you do you just cannot seem to get comfortable? And so you are just restless. Sometimes your soul feels like that. Something is wrong. You are not happy. You are not satisfied in life. You feel empty. That feeling is what the Bible calls the thirst of the soul. And every human being, all day every day, is constantly on the lookout for what will satisfy that thirst. In Jeremiah 2:13 God says, “My people have dug cisterns.” A cistern is a holding tank for water. What He is saying is the people were coming up with ways to satisfy the thirst of their soul. We are all in a constant search for the water that will satisfy our souls. Sometimes it is a very specific, conscious pursuit; other times it is just kind of in the background of your thinking and you do not even realize you are doing it. But we are all constantly looking to satisfy the thirst of the soul. It is why we pursue the things we pursue in life. It is why people get married, and it is why people get divorced. It is why we sit down and watch TV or play video games, it is why we pursue a certain career path, it is why we open the refrigerator when we are not even hungry, it is why we go on vacations, it is why we stop and take a second look at a spectacular sunset, or a beautiful woman, it is why people take drugs, it is why we listen to music. Those are all efforts to satisfy that thirst of the soul. And that quest to satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul is the cause of ninety-nine percent of our anger problems. We get mad at anyone who interferes with our effort to satisfy our thirst. Our hearts are boiling caldrons of desire, and that drives everything we do – and everything we don’t do. Every time you do not do something because you do not want to do it – that is a function of your pursuit of satisfaction.

How does the soul love?

Loving God with the soul means looking to Him for satisfaction

So what does it mean to love God with all your soul? If your soul is the seat of the appetites – that part of you that feels dry and empty and restless and longs to be filled and satisfied – what does it mean to love God with that part of you? Or to use the language of the Psalms – what does it mean to lift up your soul to God or to an idol?

Psalm 86:4 Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Remember, your soul is your spiritual stomach. To lift up the soul (the stomach of your inner man) to God means to look to God and only God as food and drink that will satisfy the appetites of the inner man. When you are restless, unhappy, empty, unfulfilled – instead of looking to music or marriage or money or friendships or career or recreation or drugs or education or sex or anything else in this world – you look only to God.

The Food/Water-Likeness of God

If someone asked you what God is like, what would you say? What would be the first metaphor that would come to your mind? Would you say, “God is like a Shepherd, guiding and protecting and feeding”? Or “God is like a refuge or fortress”? Scripture uses a lot of metaphors to describe His attributes in ways we can understand - a rock, a mother bird, a fortress, a shelter, a father, a mother, a friend, a king, a warrior, a blazing sun. If you asked the psalmists what God is like they might mention those things, but more often than not they would say, “What is God like? He’s like a banquet. He’s like Thanksgiving dinner. He’s like Country Buffet. He’s like cold, fresh spring water when you are parched and thirsty.”

Think of how often God compares Himself to food and drink:

- In Psalm 36 He is the storehouse of food and river of delights that satisfies both high and

low among men.

- In Isaiah 58 He is the feast that satisfies those who call His holy day a delight.
- In John 6 He is the real bread and real drink that satisfies the souls of all who come to Him.
- In Isaiah 55 He is the milk and wine and bread offered for free that satisfies so much more than the bread that is not bread.
- In Proverbs 9 He is wisdom's banquet that is so superior to folly's banquet.
- In Luke 14 He is the food of the great Messianic banquet that satisfies all His people for all eternity.
- In Psalm 63 He is the richest of foods that satisfies the massive appetite of the soul of David.
- In Jeremiah 2 and Jeremiah 15 and Psalms 1,42,63 and 143 He is the spring of living water that satisfies so much more than the broken cisterns and that never fails, and that supplies our roots and makes us flourish, and that David longed for like a thirsty deer.
- In Psalm 34 He is the delicacy that my soul will crave if I just taste and see.

What does all that mean? It means when you experience the presence of God that part of you that is dry and empty will be filled and refreshed and thoroughly satisfied. In fact, those passages like Psalm 63 that speak of Him as being like the **richest of foods** – the phrase translated **richest of foods** is literally “like fat and fatness.” The fatty portions of the meat are always considered the choice portions. When God compares Himself to food it is typically high fat food because the whole point of comparing Himself to food is to teach us about how satisfying He is to the soul. So He compares Himself to high-fat foods because those are the foods that are actually delightful and satisfying. God is constantly describing Himself as a feast, because that is His nature. It is one of His attributes. Just as eternity or omniscience are attributes that describe essential aspects of His very being, so is this: that He satisfies the human soul.

Part of His nature

So let me ask you this – is it possible to commune with God and come away unhappy and unsatisfied? If I get my Bible out in the morning and spend some time in Scripture and prayer and when I am all done I still feel dry and unfulfilled – is it possible that I did indeed have fellowship with Him, His presence was there, but for whatever reason on this particular day it just was not all that emotionally satisfying? No – absolutely not. That is not possible. The food-likeness of God is one of His attributes. Which means it is impossible to experience His presence and not be satisfied. That is as impossible as it would be for God to die or to sin or to forget something or to make a mistake – it would violate His nature, which is literally the most impossible of all impossible things. To the degree that you have fellowship with God your soul will be satisfied. The presence of God is not like the pleasures of this world – a matter of taste. Some people go backpacking and it is pleasurable and satisfying; other people do it and hate it. Some people are deeply satisfied by a cup of coffee; others would rather be poked in the eye with a sharp stick. The presence of God is not like that. There is no human soul that would not walk away feeling joy and delight and satisfaction and fullness and strength if they had a close encounter with the favorable presence of God. If I have my devotions and go away unsatisfied, and that restless, empty, thirst of the soul is still there, it can only mean that I have not communed with Him. Whatever I did in my devotions, it was not enough of a direct interaction with Him. Sometimes people ask, “How much time should I spend in prayer in the morning? How long should my personal devotions be?” That is like asking how long you should stay at the Golden Corral. You stay until you are full. But if you go to a buffet and walk out hungry it means you did not do what you are supposed to do at a buffet. And if you have your devotions and walk away still hungry and thirsty, it is not because you communed with the living God and found it unsatisfying. It is because you did not commune with the living God.

Do you believe God can fill your cup?

Scripture describes your capacity for joy as being like a cup. **Psalm 23:5 my cup overflows** (I am fully satisfied) When your cup gets empty, that is miserable. All human beings hate that feeling. And we fear it. The experience of having our cup run dry is so miserable, we are terrified of it. We fear it more than hardship, we fear it more than physical pain. If God told you that tomorrow afternoon between noon and 1:00 you will experience some pain, but during that same hour your cup will be full – you will be full of joy, you will be happy and delighted and fulfilled – would you be afraid? No. We are never afraid of being happy. If God said tomorrow you will suffer hardship but your cup will be full and you will be happy – you would not fear that hardship. But if God said tomorrow everything will go your way – you will have money and success and people will treat you well and you will lose some weight and all that – but your cup will be empty – you will feel discouraged and depressed and without hope and without joy – that would be terrifying. A dry cup is what we naturally fear the most.

In fact, very often that is why depressed people are depressed. It is not so much that the pain right now at the moment is unbearable, but they look toward the future and see nothing but an empty cup for the rest of their life and the weight of that just plunges them into darkness.

Fear of a dry cup is why we choose not to do things we do not want to do – we are afraid they will drain our cup. If you have a tough time getting yourself to have your devotions – or to study your Bible or pray or engage in fellowship or share the gospel or give to the needy – if you cannot get yourself to do those things it is because you are afraid doing them will drain your cup.

We avoid things that we think will drain our cup, and we idolize things we think will fill it. Our lives are driven by what we think will fill or drain our cup. And the key to loving God with all your soul is in realizing that there is only one thing that can possibly fill your cup, only one thing that can possibly satisfy the thirst of the soul – the presence of God. So anytime you walk away from any experience with an empty cup it is because you did not experience fellowship with God. If you spend two hours in prayer and read three books of the Bible and walk away empty it is because all your reading and praying were not actual fellowship with God. If your job is not fulfilling to you it is because you are not experiencing fellowship with God on the job. If being a mother to your kids is draining to you and you hate it, it is not because you are a bad mother, it is because you are not experiencing fellowship with God through your mothering. God is the only water that exists – nothing else satisfies. It seems like your favorite activity is pretty satisfying. But it is not always satisfying, is it? Sometimes even that leaves you empty. When you do your absolutely favorite thing and it leaves you dry and empty – that is God telling you, “Can you see now that nothing in the world can fill your cup? Can you see that I am the only water that can satisfy the thirst of the soul?” God fills His Word with verses comparing Him to food and drink, and then routinely allows us to feel empty and dry when we look to earthly things to satisfy our thirst so we can learn the most important lesson in the universe – that God is the only water.

Examples

Now, there is always a danger, when you use a metaphor over and over, that you can lose sight of what the metaphor even means. So let’s take a look at some specific examples.

Encouragement

One example of water for the soul is encouragement.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

We all know what it is like to lose heart because of suffering. We go through some long-term, relentless hardship, and we finally get to the point of discouragement. And it seems like there is no

way to go from being discouraged to being encouraged without the suffering coming to an end. But in the case of Paul and his companions the suffering continued, even to the point where physically they were wasting away – but they did not lose heart. On the inside they were renewed more and more by the day.

Do you have an idea in your mind of what “renewed on the inside” means? You are dragging, discouraged, weighed down, tired, bored, lethargic, unmotivated – and then God comes along, and after He does what He does you are renewed, refreshed, encouraged, strengthened, motivated, and rejuvenated. That is one example of a hungry, thirsty soul being satisfied.

Strength

Another example of this water is strength.

Isaiah 40:29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Do you know what it is like to be weak? When you are weak you try to do something and cannot do it. You make an effort, try your hardest, and fail. You are easily stopped in your tracks when you try something. Not only that, you are easily hurt. You are fragile, delicate, easily bruised, easily hurt. Somebody comes along and insults you or opposes you in some way and you just kind of collapse like a house of cards. You cannot handle the bumps and bruises of life. You cannot handle hardship, you cannot handle suffering – it just gets the better of you. You are weak. And then God comes along and does what He does and the next thing you know you are strong. Those same trials that used to throw you for a loop just hit you and bounce right off. You set out to do something that is important to you and whenever an obstacle comes up you just plow right through it. All kinds of stuff come flying your way and you come out without a scratch.

Peace

So the water gives you encouragement and the water gives you strength. And here is another one – peace. We all know what it is like to have turmoil in our hearts. A family member says some hateful things to you, you get fired from your job, you suffer some terrible injustice – totally unfair, and there is nothing you can do about it. Or maybe you have some terrifying thing coming up in the future. One way or another something happens that just sends your heart into complete turmoil. Everything inside you is agitated and worked up. Then God comes along and does what He does and now you are filled with peace. The storm in your life is still raging, but inside you are calm. Your stomach was tied up knots, but now it is relaxed. And how did God do it? By putting an end to the trouble? By bringing about instant justice? By giving you a vision of how it is all going to work out? No.

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you... with his love

All He does is visit you with His love – and you are full of peace.

Insight

When we say God is water for the soul we are saying He is the God of all comfort and encouragement, and He is the source of all strength, and the result of being in His presence is peace. That is what our God is like! And you know what else He is like? Light. Did you know that God is like

light? That means He is the only force in the Universe that enables you to see – and understand and comprehend. You hit some complicated moment in your life and you have no idea what to do. You are confused, your mind is muddled, you cannot seem to sort through the data – your mind is just kind of darkened and dull. You open your Bible and it is no help. You have no insight. Everything you read in the Bible just seems to be stating the obvious, and you understand that much, but other than that you have no helpful insights. There is a problem in your family and you are at a loss to know how to solve it. You are in the dark. But then comes God, and does what He does, and suddenly everything becomes clear. Now it all makes sense.

Psalm 19:8 The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Now it is all clear. You can look at the whole, complicated situation and organize it in a way that enables you to figure it all out.

Motivation

Here is another one: motivation. You are dragging and depressed and lazy and unmotivated, then God comes and does what He does and suddenly you are invigorated and compelled to action.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us

You go from being unmoved to being passionate (Ps.35:9, Ps.119:136).

Those are just a few examples – we could do this all day. This is what our God is like. When Moses was in His presence he came away literally glowing. But that is not the only effect God has on a person. He has all these other effects on the soul.

- You are without hope, then God comes and does what He does and now your heart is full of hope (Ps.62:5, Lam.3:21).
- You feel alone and abandoned and then God comes and now you feel loved and attended to (Ps.8:4, 10:17, Jn.14:18).
- You experience God's presence and go from discontent to a feeling of fullness (Php.4:12, 13).
- You go from being restless to feeling comfortable (Ps.23:4).
- You go from being moody or irritated to being happy and joyful (Ps.3:3).
- From being fearful and timid to being confident and assured (Ps.23:4, Ps.36:7).
- From being weary to being invigorated (Ps.19:7, Isa.40:31, 2 Cor.4:16-18).
- From being uninterested and bored to being fascinated and excited with God (Ps.119:32).
- From being distracted to being focused (Ps.86:11).
- From being unable to enjoy pleasures to having a heightened and intensified ability to enjoy pleasures (Ecc.5:19, 6:2).
- From being wounded to being healed and comforted (Hos.6:1-3).
- From feeling condemned to feeling forgiven and accepted and loved (Ro.8:1).

All that is what Scripture means by water.

When God got to day six of the creation and said, "OK, now I am going to create human beings," and He drew up the blue print in His mind, you can imagine Him thinking, *Should I make them self-propelled?* Should I make man like the sun – where they have inside them enough energy to be powered for their whole life? No – I am not going to make them like I made the sun. Instead I am going to make them so they run out of fuel every several hours. And then I am going to build into them a physical stomach that feels hunger and has an appetite that will drive them to go find food and drink several times a day. And then I am going to build into them a spiritual stomach that also feels hunger and thirst and has an appetite for Me – for My presence. The need for physical food will feel like an empty stomach and a craving for food. The need for Me will feel like an empty soul – and a craving

for things like comfort and strength and motivation and joy and insight and all the rest – and I am going to make that a relentless, compelling appetite that will drive them to come find spiritual food and drink. But I am not going to put any spiritual food or drink on planet Earth. I will remain the only source, so that just as their physical appetites see to it that they get enough food and water, so their spiritual appetites will see to it that they get enough fellowship with Me.

But then came the Fall. Man fell into sin and with that came a certain kind of insanity that I will call ADD - Acute Desire Disorder. Acute Desire Disorder is when your soul gets empty and hungry and dry and instead of craving real food and drink for your soul – instead of craving nearness to God, you crave something that is not even food (like a vacation or money or a job or husband or fun or music or sex or an easier life). Desire disorder is a terrible disease because the thing you crave does not satisfy. It is like if you got the wires crossed in your brain and craved sawdust every time your mouth got dry. Acute Desire Disorder is lethal if it is not cured, because if your cravings do not match what you actually need to satisfy your appetite, you will starve to death.

Conclusion: The Solution to Everything

Can you see why the command to love God is so central and foundational? It touches on everything. It is the solution to every problem. If I am struggling with temptation, the solution is more love for God, because if I see God as the water that will satisfy the thirst of my soul instead of sin, then I will actually desire the presence of God more than I desire the pleasure of that sin. So it is the solution to sin. It is the solution to worry, because if I know that no matter what happens to me in the future I will be able to have a full cup because of the availability of the water that comes from the presence of God – I have nothing to worry about. It is the solution to grief over loss. You lose something that God was using to bring you joy (or might have used to bring you joy), and you realize there is no actual loss because one hundred percent of the joy God was going to bring you through that thing He can still bring you. That thing you lost was not the water source – it was just a straw. And so whether it is a big loss or small loss – whether you are annoyed because you lost your car keys or you are crushed because you lost a family member – the reaction of the worshipper of God is the same: take comfort in the fact that nothing has happened to the source of your joy. Loving God with all your soul is the solution to selfish anger. We look to some earthly situation to bring us joy, someone interferes with that, we get mad – and that anger alerts us to the fact that we are looking to the wrong source to fill our cup, so we turn to God as the only source of satisfaction for our souls, and now that person can no longer interfere – anger problem solved. Loving God is the solution to everything. It is the solution to an empty, meaningless life. You get discouraged because you are not accomplishing anything important in your life. Then you realize that the most important achievement anyone could ever accomplish would be to glorify God. And nothing glorifies God more than a human being loving Him and looking to Him alone to satisfy all the longings of his soul.

Loving God is the solution to everything – not because there is anything special about love. There isn't. Love is wickedness if you love the wrong thing. Loving God is the solution to everything because there is something special not about love, but about God. He is worthy of this love. He is worthy to be the object of our full delight and our deepest desire. He is worthy to be the one to whom we look to fill our cups, because He is, according to Psalm 36:8, a river of delights.

Benediction: Revelation 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.